

served, and now at the end his foot was planted for a few brief and terrible days on the neck of landlord and bailiff, sheriff and summoner, Bishop and King.

Wednesday was an anxious day for parties on both shores of the Thames. The leaders on Blackheath knew well enough that, unless they could enter London at once, their plans were ruined. The vast and undisciplined multitude could not be fed in the wilderness. London alone could supply their needs. Another twenty-four hours and their hungry followers would begin to slink away; in a few days they would probably be left with a small band of enthusiasts incapable of facing a single squadron of men-at-arms. In numbers their whole strength lay, in numbers and in the sudden blow delivered before the upper classes had recovered from the first panic. The men of Essex, blockading London on the North, would be in a similar strait, if they were any longer kept outside the gates.

To the rulers in the city the prospect was even less cheering. They had been aware at Court that a great scheme of rebellion was in preparation,<sup>1</sup> and for some weeks they had known of actual disturbances in Essex and Kent. But the boy King, ill-advised by counsellors who showed their usual want of sense, had given the difficult task of suppression to justices with a special commission of \*trailbaston/ but with no proper force to support it. A large body of men ought to have been sent into the disturbed districts ten days before. The time for action had now passed; the government could only wait on events, for it was locked up in London. The King, the Court, the officers who might have been calling out the gentry in the shires, and crushing the rebellion wherever it appeared, were trapped in their own capital. The rebels all over the country were using Richard's name, and spreading the belief that the Rising had the royal sanction. An official proclamation denying this report would have had a great effect in encouraging the resistance of the authorities ; but the ministers were cut off from all communication with the country. The rebels outside the walls had become for the moment the focus of the kingdom, whence disaffection and riot

<sup>1</sup> Froiss., ii. 462.